

**VETERANS & SENIORS COMMITTEE
of the
SUFFOLK COUNTY LEGISLATURE**

Minutes

A regular meeting of the Veterans & Seniors Committee of the Suffolk County Legislature was held in the Rose Y. Caracappa Legislative Auditorium of the William H. Rogers Legislature Building, Veterans Memorial Highway, Smithtown, New York, on **February 3rd, 2002**.

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Legislator William J. Lindsay - Chairman
Legislator Martin W. Haley - Vice Chairperson
Legislator Andrew A. Crecca

MEMBERS ABSENT:

Legislator Cameron Alden - Excused Absence

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

Terrence Pearsall - Aide to Legislator Lindsay
Neal Capria - Aide to Presiding Officer
Frank Tassone - Aide to Legislator Crecca
Alexandra B. Sullivan - Chief Deputy Clerk, Suffolk County Legislature
Art Lozeau - Director, Veterans Service Agency
Holly Rhodes-Teague - Director, Office of the Aging
Sean Clancy - Budget Review Office
Joe Muncey - Budget Review Office
Nicole DeAngelo - County Executive's Office, Budget
All Other Interested Parties

MINUTES TAKEN BY:

Ana Grande- Court Stenographer

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(THE MEETING CAME TO ORDER AT 10:50 A.M.)

CHAIRMAN LINDSAY:

Okay. We're going to open the Veterans & Seniors meeting. Legislator Crecca is going to lead us in the Pledge of Allegiance.

(SALUTATION)

CHAIRMAN LINDSAY:

Who wants to come up first, Holly or Art? Ladies first.

MS. RHODES-TEAGUE:

Is that how it goes? Okay. Good morning.

CHAIRMAN LINDSAY:

Good morning.

MS. RHODES-TEAGUE:

Happy New Year to everybody.

CHAIRMAN LINDSAY:

Same to you.

MS. RHODES-TEAGUE:

I know you wanted a little blurb on the Office for Aging, so I guess -- I don't know, I don't know if I've ever done this with the Committee, so I'll start from the beginning.

We derive most of our authority from the Older Americans Act of 1965, so a lot of our funding comes from the Federal government. The money then goes to the State and the State reallocates out to all the Counties in New York State. We do receive funding from the State as well. Our budget is approximately seventy percent funded through State and Federal sources. The rest of it comes from the County. Up until EPIC, we were about eighty-five percent funded, EPIC has taken our number down a bit.

The programs that we run, the biggest one that everybody knows about is the Meals Program, congregate of home deliver it, and we serve about twenty-five hundred meals a date in Suffolk County. And there are, you know, we have a lot of sites, but we still have areas that we could cover if we had more funding for it.

We do this through an RFP. The same contractors we've had over the years are pretty much the ones we still have under the RFP. Nobody is running out saying I want to do this program, because it costs them money. It's definitely a combination of Federal money, State money, County money and then our contractors are kicking in as well, mostly towns and non-profits that are doing the nutrition programs for us.

We do have a great partnership with the towns for other programs as well, they do residential repair, they do the -- they're the ones that have the senior centers. That's where a lot of the -- that's where we go to get senior citizens, you know, is at their centers. We don't have a single center of our own. And that's fine with us, we like it being decentralized into the towns, it works out very well this way

for us in Suffolk. And I know a lot of other Counties are different, but it's the way programs kind of evolved in the 70's when monies started coming in for senior programs.

Some towns do more than others, some towns only have one senior center, some towns have ten, you know, six, seven, eight senior centers, it depends on the town, but we have a great relationship with them.

The other program that's large that we have is the Case Management Program. The Case Management Program is for those seniors who, you know, the very frail, elderly, we try to keep them in their home as independently for as long as possible. The Case Management is a prerequisite for trying to get home care in through the EISEP Program, and that's Expanded In-Home Services to the Elderly Program.

So we have to have the Case Management in place and then we try to do the home care. There is a huge waiting list for home care. It's just the way it works out, there's not enough aides, there's not enough money for home care. We do what we can, we're not an entitlement program, we're a program that we do what we can with what we have. We're not like Medicaid where, you know, if everybody is entitled, they get it, we do the best we can with what we have. So, that's the other large program.

Then we have a lot of small programs that we have in the County, the Respite Program, which I'll let, you know, provides friendly visiting and also provides phone calls -- no, I'm sorry, Respite, that's telephone reassurance. Respite provides a couple of hours for somebody to get out who's taking care of their spouse or taking care of a loved one and they can get done what they have to do and somebody helps out by taking care of the housebound senior. And that program provides a lot of small hours to people in the County, but it's a great resource we have.

The Operation Restore Trust is to help people understand the medical bills and to make sure that they're not getting ripped off by the doctors or by Medicare.

Ombudservice is another program that's great. That program, we have volunteers in every nursing home in Suffolk County and then we also have volunteers in a lot of the adult homes. And they are the advocates for the clients that are in those homes. And it's all volunteers. And that program is run through Family Service League and they do a terrific job with that.

LEG. HALEY:

What's the name again?

MS. RHODES-TEAGUE:

It's the Ombudsman. It really provides a great service. They can deal with the families and try to act on behalf of them with the administration of the nursing homes, because sometimes that's all they need to, you know, resolve an issue. And a lot of the people in the

nursing homes, they don't anybody to advocate for them at all, you now, there aren't family members available, so they act on behalf of

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them.

LEG. HALEY:

That always seems to be a problem. Are most nursing homes covered?

MS. RHODES-TEAGUE:

All the nursing homes are and most of the adult homes, but not all the adult homes, the licensed adult homes.

LEG. HALEY:

But all the nurses homes are?

MS. RHODES-TEAGUE:

All the nursing homes are covered. And that program, you know, if you know of an issue, you can always contact us or we can give you Ruth Berger's phone number at Family Service League, because they're very good and they do extensive training with all the volunteers. In fact, somebody who retired from our office just became a volunteer and she let me know what the training was like. She said it worked out very, very well. So it is -- it doesn't cost a ton of money, but it does a lot of good.

And that's what we try to do with all our programs, we try to do as much good as we can with what we have. You know, we're kind of all over the place, we've got our fingers in a lot of pies. I don't know if there's anything specific you wanted to talk about.

CHAIRMAN LINDSAY:

What is your total budget?

MS. RHODES-TEAGUE:

I knew that question was going to come up, it's approximately twelve million, give or take.

LEG. HALEY:

A million here, a million there.

MS. RHODES-TEAGUE:

It goes up, it goes down, you know, it's gone up a lot in the last couple of years.

LEG. HALEY:

How's the EPIC going?

MS. RHODES-TEAGUE:

EPIC. Well, you just reauthorized the co-payment portion at the meeting last week, that's good. It's going well. A lot of the

seniors still don't understand while they were prorated for the first year, but we're almost to the end -- we're at the end of that for the premiums, and the co-payments, they won't get a full year until July, but, you know, we're dealing with it.

It's going well, it really isn't -- it's a lot of phone calls. We get a lot of phone calls back. And we ran into issues with people having passed away and then they have to do the checks to the estate of, so that's another issue that we've come up with, but things that we

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never, you know, thought about before.

LEG. HALEY:

We tried to design that originally so it was manageable, but you run into the practical difficulty that you would with any new program.

MS. RHODES-TEAGUE:

Right.

LEG. HALEY:

Once it's settled, do you think it's going to be relatively manageable, easily managed?

MS. RHODES-TEAGUE:

I think so. It's just, you know, we're basically -- we had to dedicate at least -- at the beginning we had probably three or four staff members working every day on the program. Now we're down to one full-time person doing that all the time. And then some of the really, really terrible phone calls come back to another supervisor at my office.

But it's working out better, it's just they don't understand, you know, the seniors don't understand the program. Some of them sent us checks, thinking that they owed us money. I mean, there's a lot of confusion. And it's not --

CHAIRMAN LINDSAY:

And really it's just a reimbursement program.

MS. RHODES-TEAGUE:

Right.

CHAIRMAN LINDSAY:

They pay the co-pay.

MS. RHODES-TEAGUE:

Right.

CHAIRMAN LINDSAY:

They send us the bill or some proof that they paid it and we reimburse

them.

MS. RHODES-TEAGUE:

Correct. What happens is the State EPIC Program sends them the letter saying this is what you've paid, you may be eligible for reimbursement, sign the bottom of this letter, send it to Suffolk County Office for the Aging and they'll process it. And that's what we do.

CHAIRMAN LINDSAY:

So they don't make the payment, they just send us the bill?

MS. RHODES-TEAGUE:

They've made payments throughout the year to EPIC. At the end of their enrollment year, EPIC will then send them a statement saying this is what you paid. So all they have to do is put that in another

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envelope to us with a signature and we reimburse them. But, you know, a lot of them don't understand what they reads sometimes. Not a lot, we get a lot of phone calls based on that.

CHAIRMAN LINDSAY:

How many people are taking advantage of that?

MS. RHODES-TEAGUE:

I think at the end of, at the end of last, you know, in December, I think we were up to about ten thousand, which was a pretty good number, because originally we thought -- because there's approximately twenty-two thousand people enrolled in EPIC. We miscalculated in our heads how many people we would be hearing from, because those who were on the deductible plan, if they haven't reached the deductible, we won't hear from them, because they haven't put anything, anything of fees in co-payments to EPIC, so they won't get -- they won't get a statement on it. So there's still a fair of amount of people that haven't reached their deductible, so we won't hear from them. And we never gave that number a thought.

CHAIRMAN LINDSAY:

What's the deductible?

MS. RHODES-TEAGUE:

It depends on your income, it's income based.

CHAIRMAN LINDSAY:

Sliding scale.

MS. RHODES-TEAGUE:

It's sliding, correct. So, some people won't reach it. So, that's an issue.

LEG. HALEY:

The co-pay, the co-pay component is usually a higher income level, the premium component is the lower income lowers. So those with the lower income have to pay a premium no matter what, and those premiums could be reimbursed.

MS. RHODES-TEAGUE:

Yeah, but then they also have -- they also have co-payments. You pay your premium, then you pay your co-payment as well.

LEG. HALEY:

Right.

MS. RHODES-TEAGUE:

And then on the deductible, you pay your deductible, and once you reached that, then you start paying the co-payments. So, you know, if you've reached that, then you start the co-payments end of it, but some people may not reach it. And it's fairly high, you know, it's not that it's high, it's high for some seniors, you know, depending on if you're healthy or not or what kind of medications you take.

LEG. HALEY:

The whole idea is to take care of seniors at the lower end of the

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income scale.

MS. RHODES-TEAGUE:

Right.

CHAIRMAN LINDSAY:

And cap prescription drugs at some number.

LEG. HALEY:

Yes.

CHAIRMAN LINDSAY:

I mean even if you don't qualify at the lowest scales and you have some income, prescription drugs can kill you.

LEG. HALEY:

Yeah, that approach is another whole -- yeah.

MS. RHODES-TEAGUE:

Just so you're aware, under the Governor's proposed budget, there could be more cost to Suffolk, because he's increasing the costs to the seniors under EPIC. But I don't know, I haven't done any type of analysis of that at this point.

CHAIRMAN LINDSAY:

Yeah. That's what I was just going to ask you. Have you had a chance

to look at the details of the Governor's budget yet?

MS. RHODES-TEAGUE:

I'm in the process of looking at it.

LEG. HALEY:

That's how the Governor typically starts. I mean he does it with the school districts, he says, you know, I'm not giving you any more money, and by the time it all make out, it's something totally different.

CHAIRMAN LINDSAY:

But we could be affected in other ways besides EPIC too, with some of the other --

MS. RHODES-TEAGUE:

Yes, we could. There's talk about putting the EISEP Program and the CSE Program together, which sounds good to me, but I still have to look at what they're talking about in terms of they're upping the County share of the program, they're going from the twenty-five percent share to thirty percent share.

Now, because we've been able to find matching in-kind services that we provide to the County, we may be okay, I don't know, we're still looking into all that. They did -- there's a number of other proposals in there for programs, Foster Grandparents and for RSVP that I don't know how that's going to affect our local Foster Grandparents and RSVP, we're still looking into all that. There's a lot of proposals out there.

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CHAIRMAN LINDSAY:

Do you have any events coming up, Holly?

MS. RHODES-TEAGUE:

The Seniors Celebration will be May 15th, so if you can put that on your calendar. And that's at Villa Lombardi. If you've been there, we get about approximately six hundred seniors. It's a nice day. A lot of vendors are there in the morning, and then in the afternoon they have dancing and music. And I think the picnic is August 13th. Those are our two, the two events that we do.

CHAIRMAN LINDSAY:

Is it going to be as hot as last year?

MS. RHODES-TEAGUE:

We lucked out in the end on that one. All of a sudden there was a little breeze coming through.

CHAIRMAN LINDSAY:

It was hot.

MS. RHODES-TEAGUE:

A little breeze. It was hot. No rain, though, that's okay.

CHAIRMAN LINDSAY:

Yeah. Anybody have any other questions for Holly? Thanks, Holly.

MS. RHODES-TEAGUE:

Okay. Does anybody want some Program & Services Guides?

LEG. NOWICK:

I'll take one.

CHAIRMAN LINDSAY:

Art? How are you doing, Art?

MR. LOZEAU:

I'm fine, thank you.

CHAIRMAN LINDSAY:

Happy New Year.

MR. LOZEAU:

I'm Art Lozeau, Director of the Veterans Service Agency. Let me give you a quick run-down on the Veterans Service Agency, and I'll be talking to this flyer.

First, the agency was -- gets its authority from the New York State Executive Law in 1947. The flier in front of you breaks us out into -- gives you offices of where we're located. Our main office in the Dennison Building, that's on the backside of the flier. And then we have one Service Officer who's in the Riverhead office, so I have a total of three full-time, one part-time Service Officer, plus myself and then a few secretaries.

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The budget is about three hundred and sixty thousand, but it's mainly all salaries, we have very little expenses other than supplies, etcetera. Ours is definitely related towards providing the benefits towards the veterans.

If you take a look at your flier that has the inside part that breaks it out into the federal benefits in the middle and then on the right, State benefits and then service provided by Suffolk County, by far what we do with benefits for veterans, which brings in a considerable amount of money for the citizens or the veterans or their family members in Suffolk County.

Also providing information on pensions. Pensions in the context of

veterans who served during a period of war, the VA will bring their income up to a certain level. For example, for a single veteran who has low income, which occurs with a number of World War II veterans, because they worked off the books a number of years, their Social Security may be six hundred. For that single veteran, they'll bring his income up to eight hundred.

I'm not talking about disability now, I'm talking about a pension for low income. Similarly for the surviving spouse, they'll do the same thing, however, that's a pitifully low five hundred dollars a month they'll bring it up to.

The main challenge we have is the burden of proof for claims for veterans. All but one of our Service Offices are accredited with the American Legion and we use the American Legion as a power of attorney. We also use the New York State Division of Veterans Affairs as a power of attorney to advocate for the veteran at the New York Regional Office in Manhattan in the claims file.

The work that we do, where we really make our money, is to prepare that case for the burden of proof. I would very much like to tell that you the regional office, the VA itself is sitting there just saying, put the claim in, we'll pay it, it doesn't work that way.

I myself have a case I've run for a number of years, I'm still on it, about a veteran who had malaria with high fevers that caused brain scarring, then leads to epileptic seizures. The VA is not honoring it. There's no other place where he could have gotten his malaria that would eventually go to that, but they're not honoring it, because there's no proof. We're still working on it, but it's that type of thing that veterans need advocates for and who know what they're doing when they put in the claims.

There's all sorts of little intricacies to this that I'm not going to go into in this type of presentation, because it's just an overview, but it's a very major part of what we do. I will say, for instance, we filed a claim. If you look for benefits for survivors, dependency and indemnity compensation, one of my Service Officers, one out in Nassau, for example, just ran one for this lady who lived in Huntington, five children, it was the VA's fault that the man, the veteran died because of something. It was a done case, she didn't know what to do and he picked it up and ran with it and got the claim for her for back-pay of eighty thousand plus, the benefits survivor's

pay of about, over a thousand, education benefits for the kids and whatever.

That is a case that had Ron not done what he did, that woman now would

be on welfare rolls, but now she's got the survivor, education benefits, { Champ VA } , which is the medical part, etcetera, etcetera, etcetera. So, those make you feel good.

We give an awful lot of advice, that's another major benefit we do. For example, Holly was talking about the Ombudsman Program in the nursing home. Veterans who served and their surviving spouses who served, the veterans served during a period of war, are entitled to ninety dollars from the VA to use as spending money. That's in addition to the fifty dollars Medicaid allows, if they're on Medicaid, I have to preface that.

One of these things you'll find whenever you go through benefits, it's always this tiered thing where you almost like in a computer chart, yes, no, yes, no, yes, you're entitled to it. So, Medicaid surviving spouse, etcetera, they get ninety dollars a month. So, the Ombudsman Program has done a great job in making sure that their volunteers trace to see that these people that are entitled to this ninety dollars a month, get it, and we do the processing for the claims.

Now, there's an all others category with numerous phone calls helping out veterans everywhere, from some veteran who needs help with income, like on the pension, advice on nursing homes, are they entitled to the Northport VA Nursing Home, all things related to Northport and fees and so forth that we give them, the basic information, of course, give them the appropriate people to call. That's on the benefits side.

On the ceremonies side, we conduct, well, three major and other ceremonies. Upcoming on May 17th is our salute to World War II veterans. On Memorial Day there is the salute to the Vietnam veterans, but that one is conducted by the Vietnam Veterans of America at Bald Hill where they have the reading of the names of the Suffolk County residents who were killed in Vietnam. We participate in that.

On June 7th, there's a salute to woman veterans. And on June 25th it is the ceremony that marks the beginning of the Korean War. And that is run -- we co-sponsor that with the Korean War Veterans Association, the Central Chapter of Long Island. We have various other ceremonies as the occasion arises and then we scheduled those. And obviously, you all get notified of these before we run them.

My office also administers the contract grants for veterans service organizations, the ones that need monies to run various programs for them. We have about eighty of those, I'm not sure of the exact number, so it's in that area. That's basically it. Any questions?

CHAIRMAN LINDSAY:

The World War II, is that at noon at Dennison?

MR. LOZEAU:

That's going to be at Armed Forces Plaza, and we usually go at eleven

in the morning on May 17th. That is also Armed Forces Day. We pick

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that day for weather, and warm weather preferably. You bounce around as to when you're going to, for World War II veterans, and there are so many major engagements, but Armed Forces Day. In the event of inclement weather, we have it in the main lobby of the Dennison Building.

CHAIRMAN LINDSAY:
Which you had last year.

MR. LOZEAU:
Yes. That was a rough day. A lot of attended. I was actually surprised at the number we had. We had well over four hundred people in that lobby. I -- it was a nice ceremony in that there was so many people there.

CHAIRMAN LINDSAY:
Anybody have any other questions for Art? And the events on the 7th and the 25th, are they day, night?

MR. LOZEAU:
The one on the 7th is at eleven in the morning, it's at Armed Forces Plaza. And again, we'll go inside the Dennison Building for inclement weather. The one June 25th starts at six. That's the one with the Korean War veterans along with a number of the Korean people in Suffolk County, particularly church groups put together a very nice barbecue with Korean food following the ceremony. A number of dignitaries come to that.

LEG. NOWICK:
What day is that?

MR. LOZEAU:
That's June 25th. These dates I'm giving you are tentative unless something comes up, but usually they stick to that. They like the 25th, because that was the start of the Korean War, they usually pick it on that. And that happens to be -- that's a week night this year.

CHAIRMAN LINDSAY:
All right. Anybody have any other questions of Art? Thanks, Art. We'll go to the agenda.

LEG. HALEY:
We have a big agenda.

CHAIRMAN LINDSAY:
A huge agenda.

TABLED RESOLUTIONS

CHAIRMAN LINDSAY:

We have one tabled resolution, do we want to move that now?

LEG. HALEY:

Why was it tabled?

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CHAIRMAN LINDSAY:

Why was it tabled? I just don't think it was time sensitive at all.

LEG. CRECCA:

I think because it calls for, if I remember correctly, you're talking about the Carpenter resolution?

CHAIRMAN LINDSAY:

Right.

MR. LOZEAU:

Can I?

LEG. CRECCA:

Yes, come up, Art.

MR. LOZEAU:

I don't know what was the reason why -- Art Lozeau, Veterans Services Agency. I don't know why it was tabled other than I made a comment there was some wording in there that I didn't think was correct, and then I went back to Legislator Carpenter's office and gave it to them and they incorporated everything I sent. I think it's an outstanding resolution now. If you're asking me do I agree with this resolution, yeah, I agree with it.

LEG. CRECCA:

And that would make November 11th through the 17th, National Veterans Awareness Week?

MR. LOZEAU:

Well, the way it's worded, if I have the copy here, November 11th falls on different days of the week and the wording is chosen for the week period before November 11th, because it then allows for a build up to it, primarily in the schools.

The one that the President designated in 2001 played heavily with the schools and educators doing it. And there's an excellent web site that the VA has to include lesson plans and everything that children can participate in. So 11, the 17th was the one that the President did in 2001.

This resolution calls it for the week long period, done by the first

resolve, the week long period on Veteran's Day should be saying something culminating -- ending on -- the week long period ending on Veteran's Day, allows for a build up, and then finish on Veteran's Day.

LEG. CRECCA:

Okay. Thank you.

LEG. HALEY:

Do you want to co-sponsor this?

LEG. CRECCA:

Sure. I think the whole Committee should.

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LEG. HALEY:

Yes. Put the whole Committee down as co-sponsor.

CHAIRMAN LINDSAY:

Motion.

LEG. HALEY:

Second.

CHAIRMAN LINDSAY:

All in favor? Carried. (VOTE: 3-0-0-1) (ABSENT - ALDEN) APPROVED

INTRODUCTORY RESOLUTIONS

CHAIRMAN LINDSAY:

The second resolution we have by Legislator Bishop, there's a little bit of controversy about the wording. The County Executive's Office has some concerns about it. I just talked to Legislator Bishop about it, he's going to be in touch with the County Executive's Office to work it out.

It was the sponsor's wish that we discharge it without recommendation and he will get into the problems with the resolution. So, I'll make that motion.

LEG. HALEY:

Second.

CHAIRMAN LINDSAY:

All in favor? Okay. (VOTE: 3-0-0-1) (ABSENT - ALDEN) DISCHARGED WITHOUT RECOMMENDATION

CHAIRMAN LINDSAY:

If we don't have any other business, this meeting stands adjourned.

(THE MEETING WAS ADJOURNED AT 12:00 P.M.)

{ } DENOTES BEING SPELLED PHONETICALLY